

ROOSTING OF YELLOW WAGTAILS NEAR DARWIN

Niven McCrie
4 Wilfred Ct, Driver N.T.

At about 18:00 on 28 December 1986, approximately 40 Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* were observed at Sanderson Sewerage Ponds, near Darwin. Most of the birds were preening or resting, although a small number were hawking for insects over the ponds or seemed to be picking for insects on the gravel roads. The colour of the underparts varied between individual birds. Some were completely yellow from chin to undertail; others showed yellow throats and undertails but with whitish breasts and abdomens, and a number showed variations between these plumages. The birds showed clear brows, and these were noted to be whitish rather than buff or yellowish. None of the birds showed any black around the throat.

The following morning there were only six wagtails there at 08:00. On 30 December there were 25 wagtails present at about 18:00.

It has been noted overseas that Yellow Wagtails roost in large flocks (e.g. King *et al.* 1983; Viney & Phillips 1983), but this has been rarely recorded in Australia. Johnson (1982) noted the occurrence of 50 Yellow Wagtails at Kununurra, Western Australia, but generally the species is seen in northern Australia singly or in pairs or small groups (J.L. McKean pers. comm.; Blakers *et al.*, 1984; pers. obs.).

It seems likely that many or most of the wagtails roosting at Sanderson would have been feeding at the adjacent Leanyer Swamp, where they are recorded in small numbers quite regularly (J.L. McKean pers. comm.) although on two occasions I observed small groups of wagtails flying high towards Sanderson in the evening from another swamp some six kilometres away.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to John McKean for his assistance with this note.

References

- BLAKERS, M., S.J.J.F. DAVIES & P.N. REILLY. 1984. *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. Melbourne University Press: Melbourne.
- JOHNSON, R.E. 1982. The Yellow Wagtail in Australia. *W. Aust. Nat.* 15: 61-66.
- KING, B., M. WOODCOCK & E.C. DICKINSON. 1983. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*. Collins: London.

KING, B., M. WOODCOCK & E.C. DICKINSON. 1983. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*. Collins: London

VINEY, C. & K. PHILLIPS. 1983. *New Colour Guide to Hong Kong Birds*. Government Printer: Hong Kong